**Adolescent Literacy**

Research offers many effective strategies that

promote and increase adolescent literacy. Reforming programs of adolescent literacy demands strategies that target motivation, comprehension, and critical thinking.

***Motivation***

The question of motivation presents one of the

most perplexing issues of adolescent literacy.

Many students who are able to read and write

choose not to, rendering many forms of instruction ineffectual. Furthermore, as this behavior becomes ingrained, students can become less likely to become engaged with literacy practices.Research shows, however, ways to increase student motivation toward literacy.

• *Strategy Instruction:* Teaching students to monitor their own literacy practices, to look

for information, to interpret literature, and to

draw on their own prior knowledge enhances

motivation (Guthrie et al., 1996).

• *Diverse Texts:* Sustained experience with

diverse texts in a variety of genres that offer

multiple perspectives on life experiences can

enhance motivation, particularly if texts include

electronic and visual media (Greenleaf

et al., 2001).

• *Self-selection of Texts:* Many texts must be

read in common by an entire class, as the curriculum dictates, but allowing some discretion for students to choose their own texts

increases motivation, especially because these

selections can help students make connections

between texts and their own worlds.

Of course, reading self-selected texts also

increases reading fluency, or the ability to

read quickly and accurately (Alvermann, et

al., 2000; Moje et al., 2000).

***Comprehension***

Many students leave elementary school able

to decode language without fully understanding

what it says. Reform in adolescent literacy

instruction must include attention to students’

ability to comprehend what they read. Fortunately, research-based strategies are available to support such learning.

• *Vocabulary Development:* Reading, writing,

speaking, and listening can all contribute to

vocabulary development. Since each discipline

has its own vocabulary, students need

both direct and indirect instruction to actively

learn new words (Dole, Sloan, and Trathern,

1995.)

• *Discussion-based Approaches:* Making

meaning from texts is crucial to reading comprehension, and focused discussions about

academic texts can help students learn to read

better at the same time that they learn more

about a specific field. (Applebee et al., 2003).

Strategies like reciprocal teaching, question

generating, and summarizing can foster discussions.

***Critical Thinking***

Effective literacy education leads students to

think deeply about texts and use them to generate ideas and knowledge. Students can be taught to think about their own thinking, to understand how texts are organized, to consider relationships between texts, and to comprehend complexities.

• *Self-monitoring:* Focused instruction can

teach students how to consider their own understandings of a text and learn how to proceed when their understanding fails (Bereiter

and Bird, 1985).

• *Interpretation and Analysis:* A successful

program of literacy education enables students

to dissect, deconstruct, and re-construct

texts as they engage in meaning making

(Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997).

• *Multi-disciplinary:* Critical thinking takes

slightly different form in each discipline, and

effective instruction for adolescent literacy

helps students develop capacities for critical

thinking in each discipline (Greenleaf et al.,

2001).

• *Technology:* Many adolescents are drawn

to technology, and incorporating technology

into instruction can increase motivation at the

same time that it enhances adolescent literacy

by fostering student engagement (Merchant,

2001).

***Assessment***

Assessment is often seen as external to instruction, but it is an essential part of teaching. Both teachers and students benefit from multiple forms of evaluation. While high-stakes tests rarely provide feedback that has instructional value, other forms of assessment can foster literacy development in adolescents.

• *Ongoing Formative Assessment:* Assessment

that provides regular feedback about student

learning has benefits for students and teachers.

It can enhance motivation as well as

achievement among students. Teachers who

receive daily or weekly information about

student development can intervene effectively

(Biancarosa and Snow, 2004).

• *Informal Assessment:* Assessment need not

be an onerous task for teachers since there are

many ways to evaluate student achievement

informally. Brief responses to a student journal,

students’ written summaries of learning at

the end of class, or a student-teacher conference

are examples of informal assessment that

does not require a grade but provides formative

evaluation of student achievement.

• *Formal Assessment:* The test at the end of

a unit or the paper written in response to a

multi-week assignment are examples of formal

assessment that is usually graded and can

be described as summative rather than formative. When prepared and graded by a teacher as part of ongoing instruction, formal assessment can provide useful insights into student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995).